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March 17, 2010

Sustainable Communities Planning Grant and Incentives Program  
The Department of Conservation, Office of Sustainability  
801 K Street, MS 24-01  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Members and Staff of the Strategic Growth Council:

The American Lung Association in California strongly supports sustainable land use and transportation planning as envisioned in SB 375, and we are pleased that the Strategic Growth Council is developing a Sustainable Communities Planning Grant and Incentives Program to assist and improve local planning efforts. To maximize these grants' potential, we respectfully make the following requests:

First, we ask that you provide local planning funds and link them to SB 375. Local governments need resources, not only to plan for community needs, but also to link these plans to larger regional efforts, just as regional agencies need funding for regional planning. Local and regional collaboration is essential to address our shared challenges, and we hope this program will adequately fund and encourage these efforts.

Second, we ask the Council to reserve twenty percent of funds for disadvantaged communities and social justice efforts. This planning should help address significant infrastructure deficits in urban and rural infill areas; provide homes that are affordable to families of all incomes; create equitable transportation networks; provide nearby access to parks, natural resources, and farms; and address serious health concerns in lower-income neighborhoods.

Third, we know that general plan changes are often not enough to create change on the ground. All city codes, particularly zoning codes, need to align for a project to move ahead. We ask that the funds only be used for planning efforts that will make all the changes necessary for homes, jobs, parks and preserves, and complete streets to actually be created.

Finally, we have two requests related to the grant-making process. We would like to see grants be selected with the help of a public advisory committee that includes expertise in the full range of the Council's goals, such as public health, air quality, vibrant walkable and bikable neighborhoods, and other expertise.

We also hope that non-profits, universities, and COGs would be eligible to co-apply with applicants, but believe that it would be better for cities to select any for-profit partners after grants are awarded, to improve the likelihood that a public bidding process would allow us to comment on the teams that a local government might partner with.

Thank you for your hard work and your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bonnie Holmes-Gen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bonnie Holmes-Gen  
Senior Director, Policy and Air Quality